

The President's Daily Brief

22 September 1969

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COMMUNIST CHINA

There have been several rumors and much speculation over the past week that Mao Tse-tung is either severely ill or dead. The most recent report, and the one offering the most detail, comes from Time magazine's Moscow correspondent, who got it from an unnamed but "very authoritative" Soviet official. According to this version, Mao had a stroke on 2 September and is now in a critical state, kept alive only by a massive medical effort. A triumvirate of Lin Piao, Chou En-lai and Ch'en Po-ta is running things.

Coming--as most of them do--from Moscow, the rumors could be part of the Soviet Union's war of nerves with China. We note also that on many past occasions, Mao has confounded the rumormongers by suddenly reappearing after long absences in apparent good health.

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Several other circumstances lend credence to the current story:

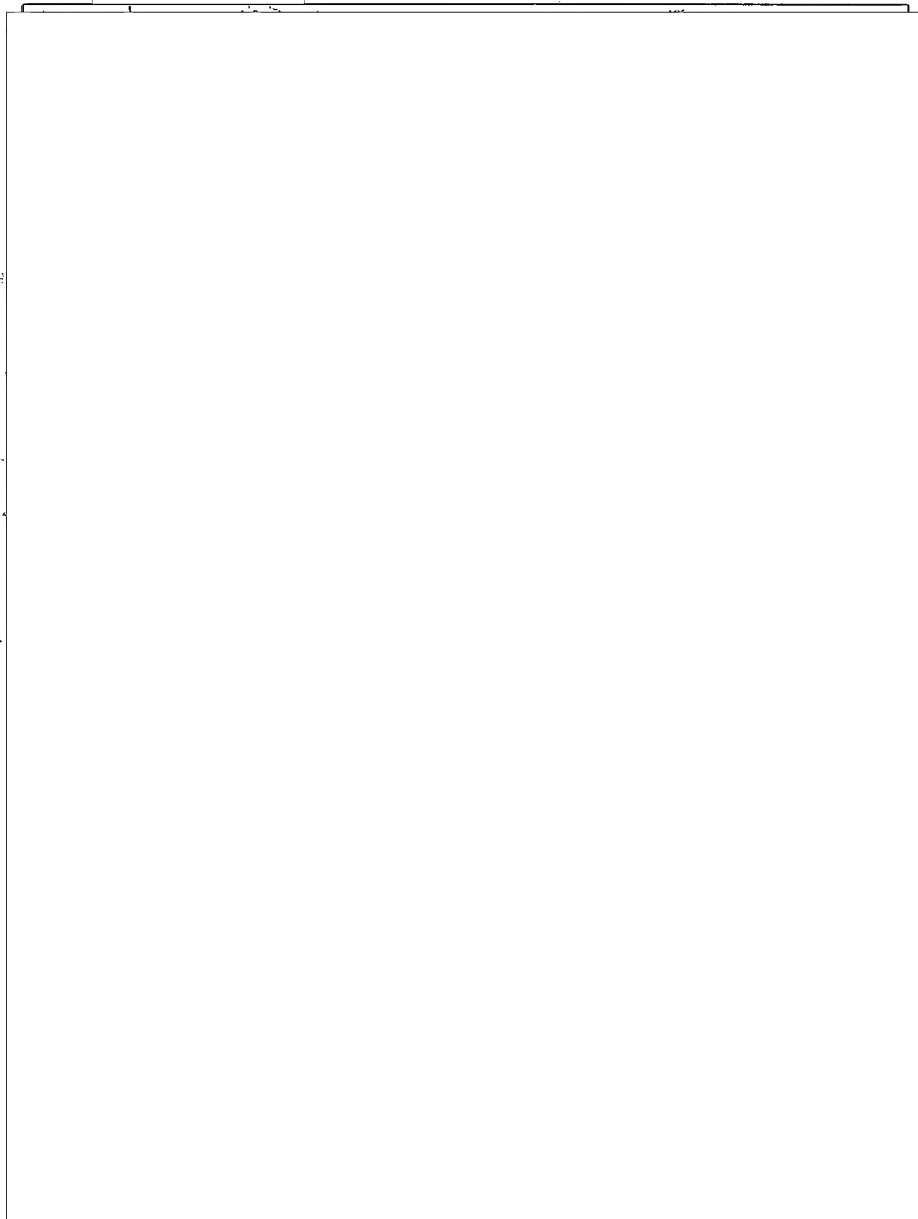
--Mao has been out of public sight since 19 May, about 18 weeks.

--The Mao cult seems to have been toned down recently. Mao badges have become less evident, and the slogan "long

LAOS:



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life to Mao," formerly heard before every news broadcast, had disappeared by the end of August.

--Both Mao and Lin were absent from Vietnamese Embassy funeral observances for Ho in Peking (Brezhnev attended the Moscow occasion).

--The brevity of Chou's visit to Hanoi on 4 September could be explained, at least in part, by his need to return quickly to an ailing Mao.

The real test of the current rumors will come soon. The regime's 20th anniversary will be celebrated on 1 October, and Mao has never missed an anniversary observance.

LAOS

Vang Pao's forces are running into increasing enemy resistance as they attempt to push north of the Plaine des Jarres. Several small but sharp Communist counterattacks have kept government troops off balance in the northwest portion of the Plaine and near the junction of Routes 7 and 71. The government hopes to hold the junction area as long as possible to forestall enemy reinforcements from North Vietnam.

Time is on the Communists' side, however. Heavy rains, which have hampered their ability to supply front-line troops, will start to taper off in the next few weeks. Better weather will also permit the Communists to bring in fresh troops from North Vietnam if they choose to do so. Government troops, on the offensive for over a month, are increasingly weary.

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SOUTH KOREA

President Pak's maneuvers to legalize a third term for himself are creating an increasing hullabaloo throughout the country. He may find less support than he originally expected when his constitutional amendment is submitted to a national referendum--probably late in October.

Students are braving rough handling by the police and stiffer penalties to demonstrate against the third term. High school students have assumed the lead, now that the universities are closed, and because they are younger they evoke greater public sympathy if injured by police.

ISLAMIC SUMMIT

Muslim leaders are meeting in Rabat today to discuss the protection of their holy places in Israeli-occupied territory. The most notable absentee is Egypt's Nasir, who is home nursing his influenza and, perhaps, his chagrin over King Hassan's refusal to postpone the meeting.

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Presummit statements by the participants indicate that the discussions will be loosely organized and open-ended.

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